

Guide to Your



Canadian Parliament



YOUR VOICE IN OTTAWA

Dr. Jim Pankiw, Member of Parliament for Saskatoon-Humboldt

Ottawa, Ontario
February 2000

Dear Constituent;

As your representative in Ottawa, I am frequently asked about my duties as an MP and how Parliament works.

This Guide to the Canadian Parliament has been prepared in order to provide insight into how our Parliament functions, and the responsibilities of its elected members. I offer this Guide in the belief that you will find the information useful and that it might encourage you to become more involved in the democratic process.

My staff and I are pleased to assist you in any way that we can; whether it be listening to and representing your views in Ottawa, or helping you through the maze of government bureaucracy. Please feel free to contact me at the constituency or Ottawa office addresses, located on the inside page at the back of this booklet.

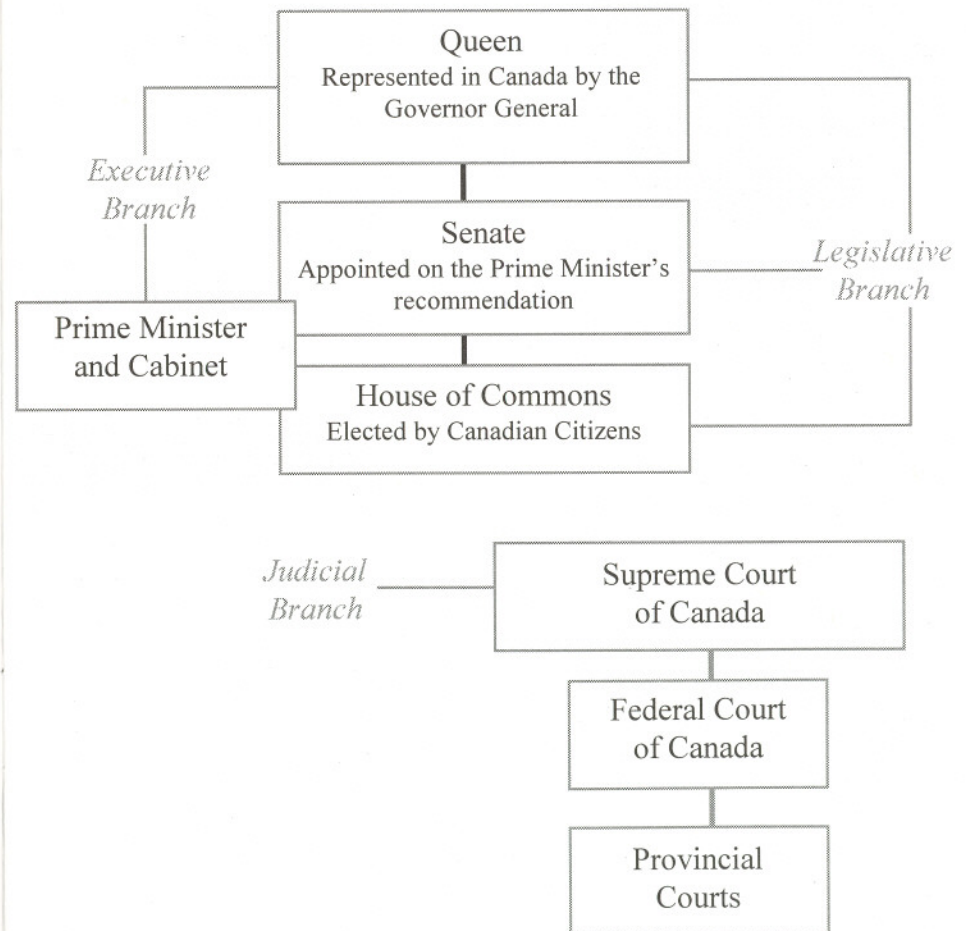
Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Pankiw, MP
Saskatoon-Humboldt

THE CANADIAN PARLIAMENT

By the *Constitution Act*, 1867 “the executive government of and over Canada is declared to continue and be vested in the Queen.” She acts, ordinarily through the Governor General, whom she appoints, on the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister. Parliament consists of the Queen, the Senate and the House of Commons.

CANADA'S PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM



Source; Eugene A. Forsey, *How Canadians Govern Themselves*



THE QUEEN

The Queen is the formal head of the Canadian state. She is represented federally by the Governor General, and provincially by the Lieutenant-Governors. All Federal Acts of Parliament begin with the words: "Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and the House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows". Acts of Legislatures in most provinces begin with similar words.



THE SENATE

While seats in the House of Commons are distributed roughly in proportion to each province's population, seats in the Senate are distributed to provide each major region of the country with roughly equal representation. The Senate has 104* members. The Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Senators hold office until age 75 unless they miss two consecutive sessions of Parliament. The Senate can initiate any bills except bills providing for the expenditure of public money or imposing taxes. It can amend or reject any bill whatsoever. It can reject any bill as often as it sees fit. No bill can become law unless it has been passed by the Senate.



THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

The Governor General is the Queen's representative in Canada. Under the Constitution, the Governor General is appointed by the Queen on the advice of the federal Cabinet. The Governor General is appointed for a term of five years, though the term may be extended.

Distribution of Senate Seats	
	Seats
Ontario	24
Quebec	24
British Columbia	6
Alberta	6
Manitoba	6
Saskatchewan	6
Nova Scotia	10
New Brunswick	10
Prince Edward Island	4
Newfoundland	6
Northwest Territories	1
Yukon Territory	1
Total	104*

* April 1, 1999 - one Senate seat added for Nunavut

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House of Commons is the major law-making body. In each of the country's 301 constituencies, or ridings, the candidate who gets the largest number of votes is elected to the House of Commons, even if his or her vote is less than half the total. The number of constituencies may be changed every ten years, pursuant to the Constitution, and the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, which allots parliamentary seats roughly on the basis of population. Every province must have at least as many Members in the Commons as it has in the Senate. The constituencies vary somewhat in size, within prescribed limits.

Distribution of House of Commons Seats	
	Seats
Ontario	103
Quebec	75
British Columbia	34
Alberta	26
Manitoba	14
Saskatchewan	14
Nova Scotia	11
New Brunswick	10
Prince Edward Island	4
Newfoundland & Labrador	7
Northwest Territories*	2
Yukon Territory	1
Total	301

* After April 1, 1999, one for NWT, one for Nunavut

Canadian Prime Ministers since 1867

1. Rt. Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald 1867-1873
2. Hon. Alexander Mackenzie* 1873-1878
3. Rt. Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald 1878-1891
4. Hon. Sir John J.C. Abbott* 1891-1892
5. Rt. Hon. Sir John S.D. Thompson 1892-1894
6. Hon. Sir Mackenzie Bowell* 1894-1896
7. Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Tupper* 1896-1896
8. Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier 1896-1911
9. Rt. Hon. Sir Robert L. Borden 1911-1917
10. Rt. Hon. Sir Robert L. Borden 1917-1920
11. Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen 1920-1921
12. Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King 1921-1926
13. Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen 1926-1926
14. Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King 1926-1930
15. Rt. Hon. Richard Bedford Bennett 1930-1935
16. Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King 1935-1948
17. Rt. Hon. Louis Stephen St. Laurent 1948-1957
18. Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker 1957-1963
19. Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson 1963-1968
20. Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau 1968-1979
21. Rt. Hon. Charles Joseph Clark 1979-1980
22. Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau 1980-1984
23. Rt. Hon. John Napier Turner 1984-1984
24. Rt. Hon. Martin Brian Mulroney 1984-1992
25. Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell 1993-1993
26. Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien 1993-Present

*Prior to 1968, "Right Honourable" was accorded only to Prime Ministers who had been sworn into the Privy Council for the U.K. Prime Ministers Mackenzie, Abbott and Bowell were only members of the Canadian Privy Council and Prime Minister Tupper became a U.K. Privy Councillor after his term as Canada's Prime Minister.

THE PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister is normally a Member of the House of Commons. A non-Member could hold the office but, by custom, would have to be elected to a seat very soon after appointment. A Prime Minister may lose his or her seat in an election, but can remain in office as long as the party can command a majority in the House of Commons. Again, he or she must, by custom, win a seat promptly. The traditional way of arranging this is to have a Member of the party resign, creating a vacancy, which gives the defeated Prime Minister the opportunity to run in a by-election.



THE CABINET

The executive of the Government, consisting of those Members and Senators appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Cabinet is the policy-forming body of the government. Most Cabinet Ministers are responsible for the administration of one or more Government departments and for reporting on their departments' activities to Parliament. By convention, almost all Cabinet Ministers are members of the House of Commons. Members of Cabinet are bound by collective responsibility.

SECRETARY OF STATE

A level of minister known as the Secretary of State. A Secretary of State, though not a member of Cabinet, is responsible for providing support to a particular Minister. Along with the members of Cabinet, Secretaries of State are bound by collective responsibility.

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

A Member of the Government party appointed by the Prime Minister to assist a Minister as the Prime Minister directs. A Parliamentary Secretary may table documents or answer questions on the Minister's behalf, when the Minister is absent from the House.

Collective Responsibility:

Refers to the principle that all members of Cabinet are, in the end, jointly responsible for the administration of government and the policies enacted by the government. As such, all ministers must support the final decisions taken by Cabinet. If a Minister does not agree with a policy position, he or she must still support the policy publicly. In addition, Ministers must not reveal any detail about Cabinet discussions. If a Minister is strongly opposed to a decision of Cabinet, only by resigning from cabinet may a Minister publicly voice opposition. Collective responsibility of Cabinet is a principle of our parliamentary system. Cabinet solidarity is imperative if the government is to maintain the confidence of the House of Commons.

INSIDE THE CHAMBER

The House of Commons meets for approximately 130 days a year. Each day the House meets or sits is called a sitting day. When it is in session, the House meets Monday through Friday. Members are called to the House by the ringing of the bells. While the bells ring, the Speaker and the Clerks march through the Hall of Honour to the Commons Chamber, with the Sergeant-at-Arms leading the way carrying the mace. After taking the Chair, the Speaker leads the House in a brief prayer. The House is then called to order and the parliamentary day begins.

THE SPEAKER

The Speaker of the House of Commons is elected by secret ballot by the House itself after each general election. He or she must be a Member of Parliament. The Speaker is the highest presiding officer, decides all questions of procedure and order, controls the House of Commons staff, and is expected to be impartial, non-partisan and as firm in enforcing the rules against the Prime Minister as against the humblest opposition back-bencher.

HOUSE OFFICERS

Seated at a long table in front of the Speaker are the Clerks of the House who are the Speaker's senior procedural advisers. At the end of the table lies the mace, the symbol of the authority of the House of Commons. At the end of the Chamber, opposite the Speaker, sits the Sergeant-at-Arms who is often seen participating in House ceremonial activities, but who is additionally the chief of security for the House of Commons. Sitting at various spots in the Chamber are the Parliamentary pages. They carry messages to the Members inside the Chamber.



GOVERNMENT BILLS

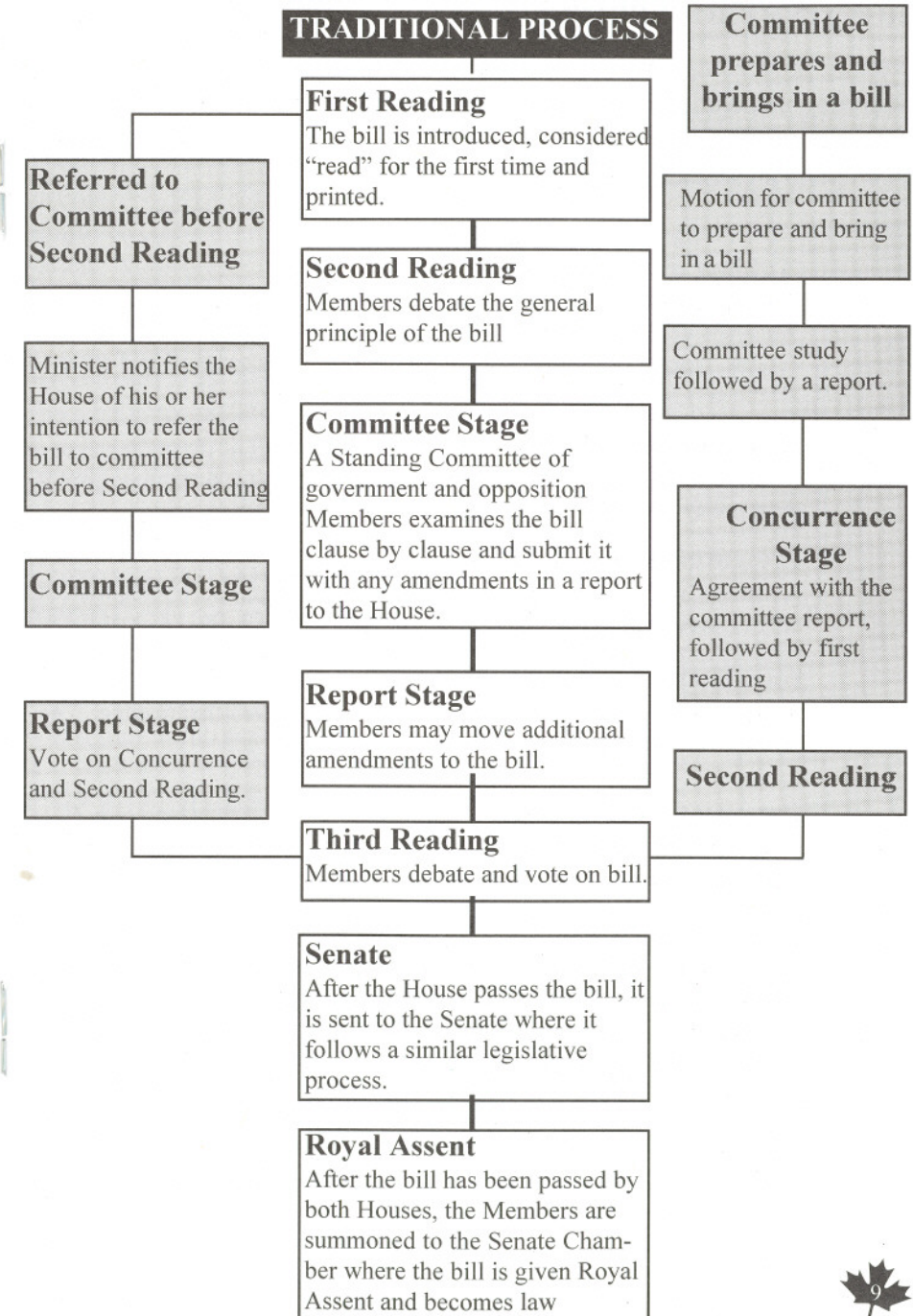
Most of the daily debate in the House of Commons concerns the legislative proposals of the government. Each bill goes through several stages in the House. First reading is a formality and there is no debate or discussion. Second reading allows Members to debate the principle of a bill. If a bill passes second reading, it goes to a committee of the house for detailed consideration. The chart found on the right shows variations to the traditional process. Witnesses are called and amendments to the bill can be proposed. When a committee has completed its study, it reports the bill back to the House. The entire House then has the opportunity to consider the legislation. During report stage debate, Members can propose additional amendments to the legislation. Once report stage is completed, the bill is called for third reading debate. Members who voted for the bill at second reading may sometimes change their opinions at third reading after seeing what amendments have or have not been made to the bill. Once a bill has passed third reading in the House of Commons, it must go through a similar process of readings in the Senate, after which it receives Royal Assent and becomes law.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Like Government bills, a Private Member's bill is a piece of draft legislation which is submitted to Parliament for approval and possible amendment before it can become law. Most Private Members' bills originate in the Commons, but some Private Members' bills are sent to the Commons from the Senate. In short, Members of Parliament who are not Cabinet Ministers can use Private Members' bills to put forth their own legislative and policy proposals. This method of producing legislation is used more frequently by opposition members than by government members.

How A Bill Becomes Law - The Legislative Process

Government bills originating in the House of Commons undergo the following process:



A WORKING DAY IN THE COMMONS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Routine proceedings cover many different items, not all of which are dealt with everyday. It includes the tabling of documents, statements by Ministers, presentation of petitions and committee reports, introduction and first reading of bills and presentation of motions.

Tabling of documents

The first item called by the Speaker under routine proceedings. At this time Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries have the opportunity to table returns, reports, responses to petitions or to committee reports and other documents.

Statements by Ministers

A minister may make a short factual announcement or statement of government policy and the opposition replies.

Presenting of Petitions

A petition by Canadians to Parliament for some action. Such a request can only be presented to the House by a Member.

Introduction and First Reading

Bills, draft Acts of Parliament, are introduced and given first reading. The proposer is allowed to give a brief explanation of the bill.

Presentation of Motions

A motion which, because of its substantive nature or procedural importance, is subject to debate before being put to a vote.

Presenting of Reports

Committees make their views and wishes known by tabling reports in the House, reflecting the opinion of the majority of the committee. Reports may deal with routine matters affecting the operations of a committee. Or, following the completion of an inquiry, the committee tables the report containing its findings and recommendations.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Any items of business (such as motions, bills or questions) that the government initiates and places on the agenda of the House.

MEMBER'S STATEMENTS

A daily 15-minute period, preceding the oral question period, when Members other than Cabinet Ministers may make statements on matters of national, regional or local importance. Statements are limited in length to one minute and the opportunity to speak is given equally to all private Members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

This closely watched 45 minutes is also known as Question Period. It is a chance for opposition Members, sometimes Members of the governing party, to seek information from the government. By questioning the Prime Minister and the other Cabinet Ministers, Members try to call the government to account for its actions.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PAPERS

Members can ask the government to present certain documents to the House of Commons. The government can respond to these requests when this item is called.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Members who are not Cabinet Ministers can present bills and motions for debate during Private Members' Business. Items are selected at random to be discussed in the House and these items may be chosen to come to a vote. A one-hour period is devoted to this business each sitting day.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A Member who is dissatisfied with a reply received in Question Period can ask, in writing, for the matter to be raised again during the adjournment proceedings. A Cabinet Minister or Parliamentary Secretary will respond to the concerns raised.

ROLE OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Members of Parliament have a multitude of responsibilities. Essentially, MPs wear three hats:

- 1 That of Constituency Representative
- 2 That of Parliamentarian
- 3 That of a member of a Political Party

CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATIVE

A Member of Parliament is responsible for dealing with any number of problems his or her constituents may have with the federal government. This can include everything from the late payment of pension cheques to immigration matters. An MP will contact various government officials on behalf of constituents in order to have these problems resolved. Members of Parliament also represent their constituents by attending official functions on their behalf. For example, on Remembrance Day MPs lay wreaths at local memorials in honour of those Canadians who paid the ultimate price during wartime. Members of Parliament also attend official openings in the riding for such things as community centres or businesses, and are frequently asked to give speeches to various local organizations. Anniversaries and parades provide opportunities to meet with constituents. In order to accommodate the needs of constituents, MPs maintain offices in both the constituency and Ottawa.



Jim Pankiw with Lorrie Terry (L) and Patricia Schryver (R), prior to a press conference demanding a public review of Saskatchewan's "no-fault" insurance scheme.

DUTIES IN PARLIAMENT

Parliament provides Members of Parliament with the opportunity to raise matters of concern in a national forum. Through debates, question period, and committee hearings, MPs are given the opportunity to shape the course of national affairs. Constituents expect an MP to be in Ottawa when the House is in session, and to take part in the business of Parliament. By doing so, not only are the concerns of constituents voiced, but the MP also has a chance to put his or her own views on the public record.

MEMBER OF A POLITICAL PARTY

During elections, parties set out their position on the major issues.

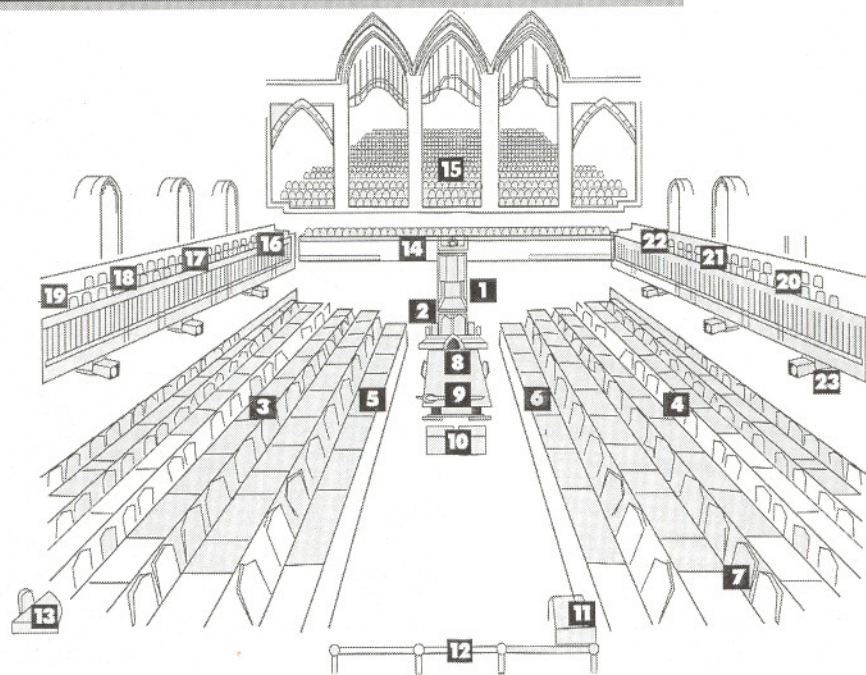
Once elected, voters expect an MP to support the policies put forth by the MP's party. If the MP refuses to do so, the government will not be in a position to honour its election commitments, nor will the Opposition be able to press effectively its objections. Political parties provide the public with information and proposals as to how they will govern. Based on those proposals and promises, members of the public determine how to vote. MPs have an obligation to support their political party as it attempts to implement these election promises, promises which can at times be controversial. As members of a political party, MPs also play a role in the functioning of the party. Each riding has a local party association which helps organize political events and helps in election campaigns. These local associations also help keep the MP in touch with the views of the constituency.



Jim Pankiw giving a speech in the House of Commons

NOTE: As a Reform Member of Parliament I have pledged to represent my constituents ahead of my party.

SITTING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Speaker | 12. The Bar |
| 2. Pages | 13. Interpreters |
| 3. Government Members | 14. Press Gallery |
| 4. Opposition Members | 15. Public Gallery |
| 5. Prime Minister | 16. Official Gallery |
| 6. Leader of the Official Opposition | 17. Leader of the Opposition's Gallery |
| 7. Leader of 2 nd Largest Party in Opposition | 18. MP's Gallery |
| 8. Clerk and Table Officers | 19. MP's Gallery |
| 9. Mace | 20. MP's Gallery |
| 10. Hansard Reporters | 21. Speaker's Gallery |
| 11. Sergeant-at-Arms | 22. Senate Gallery |
| | 23. T.V. Camera |

To the Speaker's right sits the government party with members of the Cabinet in the centre portion of the first two rows. The opposition parties sit on the left side of the Chamber, with the Official Opposition sitting closest to the Speaker. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition sit directly opposite each other. Former Cabinet Ministers generally sit closer to the front benches, with new or more junior MPs sitting towards the back.



Dr. Jim Pankiw, M.P. Saskatoon-Humboldt

Constituency Office

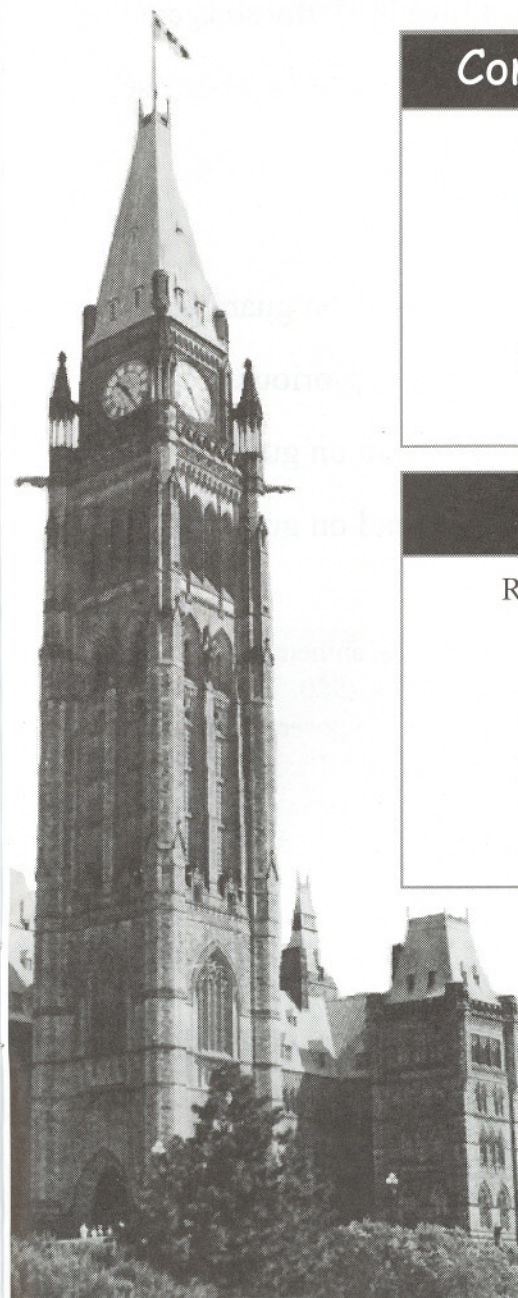
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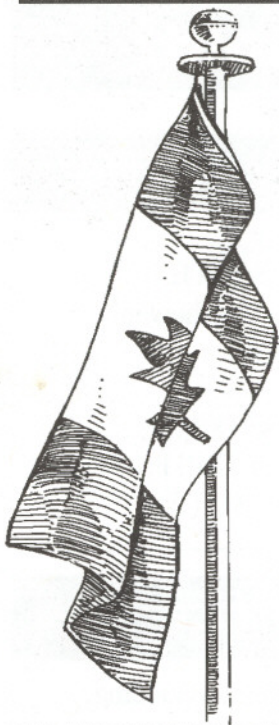
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OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM



O Canada! Our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide,
O Canada, We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land, glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

“O Canada” was proclaimed Canada’s national anthem on July 1, 1980, one hundred years after it was first sung on June 24, 1880. The music was composed by Calixa Lavallee, a well-known composer; French lyrics to accompany the music were written by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier. The song steadily gained in popularity. Many English versions have appeared over the years. The version on which the official English lyrics are based was written in 1908 by Mr. Justice Robert Stanley Weir. The official English version includes changes recommended in 1968 by a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. The French lyrics remain unchanged.

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